

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 SAB-02

L-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01

NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 /051 W

-----080005Z 063542 /75

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 946

INFO PANCANAL

USCINCSO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO CARTER STATEMENT ON PANAMA

REF: STATE 49711

SUMMARY: LOCAL COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT ON PANAMA HAS BEEN MUCH LESS THAN MIGHT BE EXPECTED. MONDAY'S GOP-GUIDED MORNING PAPERS BOTH PRINTED EDITORIALS REACTING ADVERSELY TO SOME MISQUOTEED POINTS INITIALLY ATTRIBUTED TO THE PRESIDENT. COVERAGE SUGGESTS A POSSIBILITY THAT STATEMENT IS BEING DOWNPLAYED DELIBERATELY, FOR REASONS NOT CLEAR TO US. END SUMMARY.

1. LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S WEEKEND RADIO RESPONSE TO QUESTION ON PANAMA (REFTEL) HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY SCANTY, IN CONTRAST TO NORMALLY PROMPT AND HEAVY COVERAGE HERE FOR STATEMENTS IN US SEEN AS FAVORABLE TO PANAMA.

2. FIRST MENTION WERE ARTICLES, APPARENTLY BASED ON AP MATERIAL FROM WASHINGTON BUT NOT DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTED TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AP, THAT APPEARED IN SEMI-INDEPENDENT SISTERS, ENGLISH "STAR AND HERALD" AND SPANISH "ESTRELLA" SUNDAY, MARCH 6. ENGLISH ARTICLE WAS RELATIVELY STRAIGHT, BUT NOT VERBATIM. SPANISH VERSION BORE FAVORABLE HEADLINE, BUT TEXT CONTAINED TWO SIGNIFICANT DISTORTIONS. IT ATTRIBUTED TO PRESIDENT A STATEMENT THAT US WAS CONFIDENT OF CONTINUING TO GUARANTEE TRANSIT OF SHIPS "UNITL 2000

AND BEYOND"; AND SAID THAT PRESIDENT HAD REFERRED TO A "REDUCTION" IN US MILITARY PRESENCE IN CANAL ZONE BY 2000. THE ONLY GOP-GUIDED SUNDAY PAPER, "DOMINICAL", MADE NO REFERENCE TO PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT.

3. BOTH SEMI-INDEPENDENTS FORMONDAY MARCH 7 PRINTED VERBATIM TEXT OF QUESTION AND PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE, QUOTED FROM AP. GOP-GUIDED "CRITICA" AND "MATUTINO", HOWEVER, CARRIED NO MENTION OF IT IN THEIR NEWS COLUMNS. INSTEAD, BOTH CARRIED EDITORIALS ABOUT IT. "MATUTINO", NORMALLY MORE MODERATE, SAID PRESIDENT'S WORDS ABOUT SOVEREIGNTY IN CANAL ZONE HAD "ENORMOUS" VALUE FOR AN AMERICAN PUBLIC GENERALLY IGNORANT OF THE FACTS OF THE ISSUE. BUT ARTICLE TOOK EXCEPTION TO TWO POINTS MENTIONED PARA 2 ABOVE, REITERATED GOP POSITION ON DURATION AND NEUTRALITY, AND CONCLUDED THAT PRESIDENT HAD SAID "THE FIRST PHRASES IN THE DIALOG OF THE CENTURY" AND THAT IT WAS NOW FOR PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE TO "ANALYZE WITH SAGACITY AND RESPOND WITH CAUTION".

4. "CRITICA", AS USUAL, WAS MORE OFFENSIVE. EDITORIAL WAS HEADED "JIMMY CARTER PERSISTS OBSTINATELY IN HIS ERRONEOUS POLICY WITH PANAMA" AND BORE THE INEXPLICABLE SUBHEAD "TAKEN FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN MAGAZINE MAD". EDITORIAL BLASTED WORD "REDUCTION", CALLING INSTEAD FOR "TOTAL DISAPPEARANCE" OF US MILITARY PRESENCE BY 2000. IT SAID THAT A NEW ROUND OF CONVERSATIONS IN CONTADORA "HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED" FOR THE LAST WEEK OF THIS MONTH, SAID GOP WAS MAINTAINING ITS "INVAR-

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TABLE" POSITION ON THE "SENSITVITVE" POINTS DISCUSSED DURING LAST ROOUND, WHILE PRESIDENT CARTER WAS AGAIN ADHERING OBSTINATELY TO POSITIONS "AS ABSURD AS THEY ARE UNJUST". EDITORIAL CONCLUDED BY DREDGING UP PHRASE "PRACTICAL CONTROL", AND EQUATING PRESIDENT CARTER'S ALLEGED STATEMENT WITH IT. (BOTH EDITORIALS TO BE FILED FULL TEXT BY FBIS/PANAMA)

5. EARLY MONDAY MORNING, MARCH 7, USIS/PANAMA CONTACTED EDITORS FOR ENGLISH AND SPANISH SECTIONS OF GOP-GUIDED AFTERNOON, "LA REPUBLICA" AND DELIVERED VERBATIM TEXT OF PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE. THIS WAS PRINTED WITHOUT COMMENT ONLAST PAGE OF FIRST SECTION OF SPANISH HALF OF PAPER--IT DID NOT APPEAR IN ENGLISH SECTION. "REPUBLICA" HAD NO COMMENT ON SUBJECT.

6. COMMENT: AT LEAST PART OF THIS CONFUSED COVERAGE MAY BE ATTRIBUTABLE TO WIRE SERVICES. BOTH SEMI-INDEPENDENTS ARE AP SUBSCRIBERS, WHILE GOP-GUIDED

ERSA PAPERS CARRY UPI. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS UPI DID NOT CARRY PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT OVER WEEKEND. DISTORTIONS APPEARING IN SUNDAY "ESTRELLA" COULD HAVE BEEN RESULT OF BAD TRANSLATION OF AN IMPRECISE WIRE SERVICE ARTICLE. FROM TEXTUAL MATERIAL, WE ARE CERTAIN THAT BOTH MONDAY EDITORIALS REFERRED DIRECTLY TO THIS "ESTRELLA" ARTICLE.

7. HOWEVER, USIS ADVISES THAT "REPUBLICA" EDITORS NORMALLY PLAY THINGS STRAIGHT, AND COOPERATE WELL WITH USIS. "REPUBLICA" ENGLISH EDITOR WAS REPORTEDLY QUITE ANXIOUS TO HAVE VERBATIM TEXT--BUT DID NOT CARRY IT AT ALL. BAD PLACEMENT IN SPANISH SECTION AND LACK OF ENGLISH COVERAGE CANNOT BE BLAMED ON LACK OF UPI WIRE COVERAGE. THIS SUGGESTS AT LEAST A POSSIBILITY THAT PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT IS DELIBERATELY PLAYED DOWN. THE REASONS WHY THIS MIGHT BE SO, IN VIEW OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MANY POINTS IN IT NOTABLY MORE FAVORABLE TO PANAMA THAN ANYTHING THE PRESIDENT HAS PREVIOUSLY SAID ON THE RECORD, ARE NOT CLEAR TO US.
JORDEN

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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